United Nations A/C.4/54/SR.23

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session
Official Records

Distr.: General
6 June 2000
English
Original: Spanish

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 23rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 17 November 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Zacheo ..... (Cyprus)
later: Mr. Kazhura ..... (Belarus)

Contents

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

00-32802 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/54/21 and Add.1 and A/54/415)

1. **Mr. Al-Bader** (Kuwait) endorsed the statements made on behalf of the Arab Group and the Group of 77 and China and said that he welcomed the work of the Department of Public Information (DPI), which consisted of publicizing the work of the United Nations and seeking to reduce the continuing technological inequality between developing and developed countries in the information field. In order to be ready to adapt to the changes that would come in the twenty-first century, the Department would need to propose an innovative information policy, and Kuwait invited it to take advantage of the Millennium Assembly to prepare world public opinion to that end.

2. He noted with satisfaction that the Department had made every effort to take advantage of the new technologies, particularly the Internet. He supported the view that the number of United Nations Web sites must be increased and the Arabic site further developed. It was important for Member States to increase their financial contributions so that the Department would have the necessary resources to fulfil its mandate and adapt its policies to the rapid evolution of information technologies. It was also necessary for Member States to open up the information channels that they controlled in order to enable information to circulate freely.

3. He supported the request that the Department should endeavour to meet the interests of the developing countries so that they could acquire new information technologies; the special information programme on the question of Palestine should be implemented in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Department should also devote more attention to promoting public awareness of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

4. **Mr. Ri Kwang Nam** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that despite the intense work of the Committee on Information since its establishment 20 years earlier, there was increasing marginalization of the developing countries in the information and communications field. Only countries which possessed modern science and technology benefited from information technologies.

5. The use of information to violate the sovereignty of other countries and to intervene in their internal affairs could not be tolerated. The United Nations should seek to ensure that information served to strengthen ties of friendship and cooperation among States and to promote sustainable development. Those objectives could be achieved only if a new, more equitable and effective world information and communications order was established, as indicated in the report of the Committee on Information (A/54/21 and Add.1). A cornerstone of that new order should be respect for the sovereignty of each country and non-interference in the internal affairs of each State. The international community must not permit certain countries which monopolized modern communication media to use them to impose their own ideology and cultural values.

6. Secondly, the new order should strengthen the information capacity of the developing countries with United Nations assistance. The organizations of the system should assist in modernizing the information infrastructure of those countries through a more generous distribution of resources, the transfer of advanced technology and the training of directors and technicians so that the developing countries could promote economic development and progress in education and culture.

7. Thirdly, United Nations information activities should be objective, impartial and directed to all Member States in accordance with the universality of the United Nations. His delegation considered that United Nations information practices manifested partiality by devoting a lot of attention to big countries while neglecting small countries; they exaggerated the problems of weak countries and ignored those of the major Powers. The Organization would continue to inspire confidence only if it showed itself to be impartial and objective in its information activities.

8. **Mr. Dorjsuren** (Mongolia) supported the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He drew attention to the indisputable advantages of technological progress in information and telecommunications (dissemination of information in real time, digitization, easy access to cyberspace) and stressed that the disadvantaged situation of the developing countries deprived their inhabitants of those benefits and, consequently, of the possibility of enriching their culture and knowledge. Mongolia favoured a new

world information and communications order based on a free and balanced flow of information accessible to the people of the entire world.

9. DPI played an important role in disseminating objective information on world problems and United Nations activities. His delegation agreed that the Department should be restructured with a view to reorienting United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications and introducing modern media such as the Web-based United Nations news service. It also attached importance to the Under-Secretary-General's new outreach strategy for the Department, which involved partnerships with organizations of civil society throughout the world. He also highlighted the importance of rapid delivery of news to the global media, which continuously disseminated information about United Nations activities in response to world problems.

10. While recognizing the effectiveness of the modern media, he wished to stress the importance of the traditional information media. He welcomed the measures taken to strengthen the international radio broadcasting capacity of the United Nations and believed that the Department should also reflect the great variety of United Nations activities in its television programmes and disseminate more information on peacekeeping operations, especially in the countries in conflict, so that people could better understand the objectives of those operations.

11. He hoped that the necessary funds would be allocated in the proposed budget for the biennium 2000-2001 so that the Department could fulfil its mandate.

12. Referring to DPI publications, he noted with satisfaction that the publication *Discovering the UN* had been translated into Mongolian and had been made available to participants in a seminar held in Mongolia in June 1999.

13. His delegation supported the proposals, recommendations and draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Information.

14. **Mr. Elgharari** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) supported the statements made on behalf of the Arab Group and the Group of 77 and China. Referring to the globalization of information, he emphasized the importance of establishing a new, equitable and balanced world information order that would permit the free flow of information throughout the world and provide for new machinery to strengthen cultural relations among peoples and break the monopoly on science and knowledge, which should belong to all humanity. When a few countries controlled the modern communications media through their technological progress, information became a dangerous instrument since it was used to impose foreign values and sometimes to distort the truth about certain States; his country had had direct experience of that for some time. The United Nations was playing an increasingly important role in the maintenance of peace and the settlement of conflicts, although the great Powers were trying to sweep it aside. Consequently, there was a need to improve the Organization's image and to proceed with the current reform, avoiding the hegemony of the great Powers. To that end it was essential to strengthen DPI, especially with regard to information on disarmament and the danger of small arms, prior to the conference to be held in 2001.

15. His delegation would like to see Arabic used more frequently in the electronic transmission of United Nations information and in official documents. Stressing the importance of the traditional news media, he said that be supported the broadcasting of United Nations information in the six official languages and especially in Arabic.

16. His delegation supported the Department's efforts to train the journalists of developing countries, respected the role played by United Nations information centres in the various countries and recalled that his country had been funding the centre in Tripoli for the past 20 years.

17. **Ms. Khanam** (Bangladesh) supported the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China but stressed that it was important that the various bodies involved in public information activities should adopt a coherent and results-oriented approach. Her country was concerned that, despite the expanded organizational structures, a sizeable percentage of the population of the developing countries was not fully aware of United Nations activities. DPI had failed to achieve the goals it had set itself because it had focused on the developed countries and paid little attention to the developing world; the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices in the name of financial austerity had also been a factor.

18. In order to promote a positive image of the United Nations, it was important to develop a new communications culture; accordingly, Bangladesh supported the increasing use of advanced technology, but not at the expense of the traditional media, which were still the main source of information in the developing countries.

19. In terms of the focus of DPI activities, she said that information about the United Nations should focus more on United Nations activities and accomplishments in the area of economic and social development. DPI should assist the developing countries in the information-related fields, particularly with regard to the training of journalists, and should collaborate more effectively with Governments to prepare study courses on United Nations activities. DPI press releases should focus more on the intergovernmental aspect of the work of the Organization rather than on the role of the Secretariat as had been the case thus far.

20. Her delegation supported the efforts to turn the Dag Hammarskjöld Library into a virtual library accessible electronically from any part of the world, but pointed out that there was still a need to acquire books and periodicals. Not only were fewer books being purchased but most of the books relating to peace and security were kept in the United Nations library in Geneva, causing obvious inconvenience to delegations that wished to consult them. She did not understand the rationale behind that policy. She urged DPI to remedy the situation promptly and called on the library to acquire more publications and periodicals from the developing countries.

21. In conclusion, she expressed serious concern at the integration process in general and at the status of integrated United Nations information centres in particular. For years, her delegation had been saying that the integration of the information centres with the UNDP field offices had been neither functionally efficient nor cost-effective. Clearly, the services provided by those centres had deteriorated drastically. The draft resolution adopted by the Committee on Information requested the Secretary-General to carry out a case-by-case review in consultation with the host Governments of the countries where those centres had been integrated. She wished to know when that review would be undertaken.

22. *Mr. Kazhura (Belarus), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

23. **Mr. Sai** (Algeria) said that the new millennium would bring an explosion of information and progress in technologies and communications. The technological revolution, together with the spread of computers and information, had reduced distances between peoples and transformed the world into a global village. That change, though beneficial, was cause for concern because it could further heighten the differences between developed and developing countries. Some 90 per cent of the world's news media belonged to the developed countries, a fact which enabled them to shape public opinion in a way that favoured their economic and political interests.

24. Considerable progress had been made in Algeria with regard to information and the multi-party system. In Algeria there were currently more than 28 dailies, as well as many periodicals and reviews, most of which belonged to the private sector. The State had given financial and political support to facilitate that trend and to promote dialogue between the press and readers.

25. He endorsed the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and hoped that it would give rise to a collective movement. While communications technology was extremely advanced, the fact was that television and the press continued to be important, especially in the developing countries, and must therefore be strengthened. He urged the Secretary-General and DPI to continue to give attention to those media and to respect linguistic diversity in the United Nations. Information, whether written or transmitted by radio, television or the Internet, should be disseminated in all languages and especially in Arabic.

26. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) supported the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The world had become a global village thanks to the colossal progress achieved in communications, but inequalities of access to information and information technologies raised serious problems, especially for the developing countries. The international community should promote a new, more equitable world information order based on free circulation and broader and more balanced dissemination of information. In fact, for the majority of human beings to have access to information it was necessary to employ the traditional means of communication, especially radio, since television and

the press continued to be a luxury in the majority of the developing countries.

27. Senegal understood the importance of the new technologies; it had availed itself of all opportunities to improve the situation in that regard and urged the United Nations to improve the assistance provided to developing countries so that they could share in the benefits of the information age.

28. He welcomed United Nations efforts to improve its Web site and supported the creation of versions in the six official languages as soon as possible in order to attract new users. Among recent initiatives, it was important to note the participation of African journalists, including one Senegalese, in the information services of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

29. His Government supported the development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity and was considering how to contribute to the project but stressed the need to give the French section of the United Nations radio the means to better transmit information on the Organization's activities to the countries of Africa and the rest of the world.

30. **Mr. Ba-Isa** (Yemen) said that the growing interest in participating in the Committee on Information and the valuable contributions to the debates indicated the great importance which the international community attached to questions of information.

31. The technological revolution and the flow of information had transformed the world into a global village. The United Nations should disseminate cultural values and promote the cultural integration of peoples in order to contribute to the objectives of peace, disarmament and stability.

32. The developing countries were very much behind in the development of information technology and required scientific, technical and material assistance in order to develop their infrastructure and thereby to participate in that process.

33. It was encouraging to note the valuable work carried out by the United Nations information centres in organizing activities and disseminating information in the local languages in order to publicize the Organization's work. The centres could help in implementing the new communications strategy with the participation of the institutions of civil society. Despite the financial limitations, there was a definite need to give more support to the information centres. He highlighted the efforts of the communication and information centres in Yemen and said that it was necessary to appoint a director and to give the centres support so that they could carry out effectively the tasks entrusted to them.

34. Interest in maintaining and improving United Nations Web sites had been expressed. The Internet was an important instrument for projecting the Organization's image in the world, but there should be a balance among the languages used. Furthermore, it was necessary to bear in mind the need to maintain the traditional news media, which were more accessible in the developing countries.

35. **Mr. Winn** (Myanmar) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

36. Information and communication technologies were of vital importance if all countries were to keep pace with the rapid changes in the world. Myanmar supported the establishment of a new world information and communication order that would rectify the imbalances between the developed and the developing countries in the availability of information and the capacity to process it. To that end, it was essential to increase assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in the developing countries. His delegation welcomed measures taken to restructure DPI. Moreover, it supported the creation of a United Nations information strategy and considered that the Organization should focus on development issues.

37. While the Internet had been called the fourth medium for the dissemination of information, his delegation believed that the traditional media — such as radio, television and the press — would continue to be the primary media for many countries for the foreseeable future.

38. He commended DPI, especially for its training programme for media professionals from developing countries, and thanked it for facilitating the participation of an information official from Myanmar in that programme.

39. **Mr. Eguiguren** (Chile) said that his country associated itself with the statements made by the

representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

40. On 14 October, the representative of UNICEF in Burundi had been murdered together with an official of the World Food Programme and other nationals of that country. The representative, Luis Zúñiga, had been a Chilean citizen who, one month earlier, had broadcast a message to the Burundian nation urging the combatants to permit UNICEF to vaccinate children against polio. A three-day ceasefire had been achieved for that purpose. That was an example of the use of information for peaceful and humanitarian purposes.

41. Activities of that kind by United Nations humanitarian workers in general were not well known. Neither was it known to what extent news of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and declarations reached areas of conflict. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had indicated the role which the Department should play in order to improve the Organization's communications and information capacity in the field. His Government considered that it was very important to continue studying that aspect and that the Committee on Information should participate in that study.

42. He agreed that it was necessary to revitalize the Committee on Information as a forum for discussion of public-information and communications strategies. One important aspect to be considered was how to bring the United Nations message of peace to areas of conflict.

43. **Mr. Zaagman** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States, including the member States of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that freedom of information was of fundamental importance to all people. Communication, and particularly independent, pluralistic and free media, contributed to both democracy and development. Thus, it was shocking that many journalists continued to be imprisoned, intimidated and harassed throughout the world and that some of them were even killed because of their courage to defy all possible obstacles for the sake of keeping the world informed. The countries on behalf of which he spoke condemned the use of violence to silence journalists or otherwise obstruct their work.

44. The Western Group supported the work of the Committee on Information and hoped that, as in previous years, the Fourth Committee as a whole would endorse the recommendations submitted to it. The Group also welcomed the report of the Secretary-General's on questions relating to information (A/54/415 and Add.1), which provided a good overview of the Department's policies and strategies.

45. One of the most important United Nations activities was peacekeeping operations. The importance of the information segment in a peacekeeping mission was often underestimated. The mission's success could depend on the dissemination of adequate information to the local population and also to the world at large since public opinion could determine the level of support that the mission received.

46. He noted with satisfaction that DPI was now included in consultations and preparations at the earliest stages of peacekeeping and other field missions.

47. The United Nations needed to develop an effective communications strategy in order to meet the challenges of the information age. The Western Group therefore supported the Department's efforts to build partnerships with the various elements of civil society in order to increase public awareness of United Nations issues at every level of global society, mobilizing greater support and resources for the Organization.

48. In view of the budgetary constraints, the European Union encouraged the Department to focus its activities on the areas specified in draft resolution B and to continue to embrace the new technologies of electronic communication in order to increase efficiency in the publishing and dissemination of information.

49. The Group of Western European and Other States welcomed the development of the United Nations Web site and considered that the latter's improvement, based on the achievement of multilingual parity through a modular approach was the road to be taken.

50. **Mr. Vantsevich** (Belarus) said that after 50 years, the United Nations was undertaking a reform process to adapt its activities and methods to the new global situation. Reform of the public information system was an important factor in promoting the efficiency of the

United Nations. The Secretariat must endeavour to become more innovative and action-oriented in order to disseminate information on the many activities carried out in the fields of peace and security, sustainable economic development and human rights. He acknowledged the work of DPI in that area.

51. He welcomed the recommendation made in draft resolution B, approved by the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session, that, through its reorientation, DPI should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition. The image of the United Nations in the coming century would be largely dependent on the degree and extent to which the public and Member States understood the Organization's basic activities.

52. His Government attached great importance to the work carried out by the United Nations information centres and the information units of the United Nations field offices since those centres and units were a valuable and, in some cases, the only source at local level of reliable information on the Organization and its functions and were therefore extremely effective means of promoting a better understanding of those activities. In addition, those centres and units played a special role in disseminating information on the concrete problems encountered by the group of States with economies in transition and their efforts to achieve sustainable development in the economic and social fields. His Government had continually supported the steps taken to integrate the information centres with UNDP field offices since that would make it possible to better coordinate the use of financial resources, diversify the scope of information activities and increase the efficiency thereof. In taking decisions on that matter, the views of the Governments of beneficiary countries and conditions in the field must be taken into account.

53. His Government had decided to establish a United Nations House in its capital, Minsk, in order to bring all the Organization's funds and programmes carrying out operations in the country under one roof and thereby to increase the efficiency of those operations. That decision had been taken in light of the anticipated increase in the volume of work of the Minsk information centre and of the measures taken to promote the exchange of information between Member States of the Organization. Another example of fruitful cooperation between Belarus and the United Nations in the field of information was the recent opening of a second depository library as part of the main library of the State University of Belarus; that had been made possible through technical and material assistance provided by the UNDP office in Minsk, especially its information unit, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. An Internet-linked computer network had been set up in the new depository library in order to give users easy access to United Nations Web sites and the optical disk system.

54. Belarus had suffered from the harmful effects of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and therefore acknowledged the usefulness of the efforts made by DPI and other bodies of the United Nations system to disseminate information on the situation that had existed since the accident. There was a continued need to investigate and divulge balanced, detailed information on the technical aspects of that disaster and on its impact on health and the environment. His Government welcomed the establishment of a special section of the United Nations Web page with information on Chernobyl.

55. Furthermore, his Government was following with particular interest the Department's efforts to implement the pilot project for the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations and supported the Committee on Information's request at its twenty-first session that DPI should launch that pilot project as soon as possible by contacting interested Member States and specialized agencies to seek the assistance necessary to the success of that project. Belarus would also participate actively in efforts to obtain the resources necessary to its implementation.

56. **Mr. Tekaya** (Tunisia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made at an earlier meeting by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

57. In recent years, technological advances in the information and communications sector had been impressive and had had very varied repercussions in various spheres, including economic and trade relations throughout the world. Ideas circulated more rapidly, yet the disparities between the developing and developed countries, including the differences in their technological capacities in the information and communications sector, continued to grow. Those

disparities could be reduced only through understanding, cooperation, solidarity and partnership. The United Nations had an important function in that regard, especially in terms of international cooperation and provision of assistance to developing countries in order to enhance their capacity in the communications sector. The Organization should conduct its work more effectively in order to place information at the service of international peace and security. In providing such assistance, it should bear in mind the specific priorities and requirements of each of the recipient countries.

58. Tunisia had given an important place in its policies to questions relating to information because of their importance for the strengthening of freedom of expression and democracy and for economic and social development. Tunisia had prepared a broad plan to promote use of the most advanced technologies in the communications sector, establish the necessary infrastructure and provide that sector with the appropriate legal framework. Furthermore, it had adopted a set of measures to promote investment in information services. For example, during the previous week, the first Week of the Internet had been observed in Tunisia; exhibitions and other activities had been held in various parts of the country to promote awareness of those questions.

59. He commended the work of DPI aimed at harnessing modern communications technologies, including the Internet, in order to strengthen United Nations capacity to disseminate its message with the necessary speed and effectiveness. While encouraging those initiatives, Tunisia held the view that the traditional means of information continued to be very important, especially for mobilizing world public opinion in support of the principles and purposes of the United Nations. It was necessary to continue to support those traditional means of information and to allocate sufficient resources to those tasks.

60. The United Nations information centres fulfilled a very important function in publicizing the Organization's activities. Tunisia hoped that maximum priority would be given to the task of preserving and strengthening the structure of those centres. Integration of the centres with the UNDP field offices, mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report, was encountering difficulties in certain countries. The Committee on Information had also considered that question at its twenty-first session and had drawn attention to the need to find a solution. He reiterated that the situation should be resolved in accordance with the pertinent General Assembly resolutions, on a case-by-case basis and bearing in mind the views of the country in question.

61. Lastly, he noted that, at its resumed twenty-first session, the Committee on Information had considered the question of developing United Nations Web sites in all the official languages and had recommended that the General Assembly should invite the Secretary-General to submit proposals with a view to attaining that objective. He stressed the continuing importance of giving equitable treatment to all the official languages.

62. **Mr. Radolf** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that at the dawn of the third millennium, the principles and ideals proclaimed in the UNESCO Charter, especially the free flow of ideas, equal opportunity for education for all, the propagation of knowledge and access by all people to the material published by any of them, took on special relevance and even a determining value.

63. The UNESCO communications strategy, formulated in 1989, was coming to the fore in the current planetary discussions on knowledge transfer, new technologies and the Internet. The object of that strategy was to encourage the free flow of information at the international and national levels, to promote the wider and better-balanced dissemination of information, without any obstacle to freedom of expression, and to strengthen communication capacities in the developing countries in order to increase their participation in the communication process.

64. UNESCO had raised funds for communication training and infrastructure through the International Programme for the Development of Communication. UNESCO initiatives in community radio, rural newspapers, public-service radio and television, regional and national news agencies, computer-generated cartoons and documentaries and youth- and women-oriented communications projects to combat AIDS, were well known. The most crucial problem to resolve, however, remained that of the deepening chasm that separated those who increasingly determined the destinies of peoples — those who owned and managed the technologies of the information society —from those who had thus far been excluded and who accounted for over 90 per cent of the world population. That imbalance was reflected

in the use of the Internet, the oligopolies that controlled the planet's electronic commerce, current problems relating to intellectual property, the protection of privacy and personal information and the defence of freedom of expression on the Internet.

65. Faced with those challenges, the question arose as to whether the United Nations system, and particularly UNESCO, in close cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union, had any special role to fulfil. First, there was a need for planetary-level agreements to guide communication and telecommunication policies aimed at harmonizing international tariffs and levelling the current systems of taxing communication flows that were intrinsically international and, by so doing, to help democratize the redistribution of those resources. Second, UNESCO had a special responsibility to protect and promote the world public domain of intellectual property, both material and non-material, and to be vigilant and sensitive to the ethical and social dimensions of operating on the Internet or any new form of electronic communication. Third, there was a need to strengthen the ability of the United Nations system to provide an intellectual forum for discussion of the social, ethical and developmental dimensions of new communication technologies and to ensure the system's capacity to respond to the development demands of member States through organs such as the International Programme for the Development of Communication.

66. The ultimate objective of those strategies was to ensure the inviolability of the intellectual content as potential national resources transmitted by the new technologies. National content on the information highway was not merely a heritage for social, cultural and intellectual development: it also represented the nation's basic "information capital" from which a vast array of value-added products could be derived. In order to benefit widely from the national content, a basic requirement was to promote a dynamic world electronic public domain, including information produced with public funds, classical and traditional works not covered by copyright, and other works such as scientific literature and freeware computer programmes which fell into special not-for-profit domains. A meaningful public domain could be created only if each country produced content and applications in its languages and sensitive to its specific national and ethnic cultures.

67. **The Chairman**, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX), invited the Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to make a statement before the Committee.

68. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)), said that the item under discussion was of paramount importance given the rapid developments in communication technologies, particularly through the Internet; the label "Information Age" given to the start of the new millennium was most apt. Those rapid developments called for a new approach to Islamic information in order to keep up with those changes in accordance with the spirit of Islam and its noble values and to establish an effective, well-developed information system.

69. The Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers at its twenty-sixth session, held in Burkina Faso from 20 June to 1 July 1999, had called for the implementation of the Islamic Program for Development of Information and Communication. That programme was aimed at developing, establishing and supporting the infrastructure of the various information and communication sectors with a view to enhancing their contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of the 56 States members of OIC.

70. He emphasized the cooperation between OIC, UNESCO and ITU and the efforts made by the OIC General Secretariat, the Al-Quds Committee, the Islamic Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs and other OIC bodies. Two specialized institutions of OIC, namely the International Islamic News Agency and the Islamic States Broadcasting Organization, were adopting a new methodology that kept abreast of modern transformations generated by new information and communication technologies. With that methodology, those institutions desired to counter the ever-increasing challenges in the information domain, such as campaigns aimed at obliterating the Islamic identity of the peoples of the OIC countries and distorting their beliefs.

71. With regard to the role of the United Nations in the sphere of information and communication, he drew attention first to the need for efforts to narrow the gap between the developed and the developing countries in the communications field in order to enable the latter to acquire more advanced means of communication, preserve national sovereignty and cultural identity and participate in the free and balanced exchange of

information. Second, he drew attention to the need for continued development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages, including Arabic, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/208 C, and the need for DPI to continue its activities in the field of publications, radio and television services and the United Nations libraries. Third, he expressed support for the suggestion that a Web page dedicated to dialogue among civilizations should be developed. Fourth, he stressed the need for DPI to continue its special information programme on the question of Palestine and to extend its assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development and the promotion of the Bethlehem 2000 project. In that regard, he said that in order to take its place in the information and communication field, the Organization of the Islamic Conference looked forward to enhancing and strengthening its cooperation with the United Nations. The secretariats of the two organizations and their affiliates would discuss that issue and others at their coordination meeting, to be held in Geneva in the year 2000.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.

United Nations A/C.4/54/SR.24

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
11 April 2000
English
Original: Spanish

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 24th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 18 November 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Zackheos ..... (Cyprus)

Contents

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

Completion of the Committee's work

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

00-29365 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/54/21 and Add.1, A/54/415)

1. **Mr. Troyjo** (Brazil) said that his delegation endorsed the statement by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group and by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

2. Brazil was following closely the process of integration of the United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and agreed with the General Assembly that the issue should be approached on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and the autonomy necessary for information centres to carry out their functions. As far as the Centre in Rio de Janeiro was concerned, Brazil welcomed the appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. Carlos dos Santos.

3. His delegation attached great importance to the use of traditional means of communication to spread the message of the United Nations. Radio broadcasts were particularly useful, since they could reach the most remote areas of the globe and were highly cost-effective. Brazil welcomed with particular satisfaction the signing of an agreement between the Brazilian Public Radio Network (Radiobrás) and United Nations Radio, which, through a receiving network which reached nearly 2,000 radio stations nationwide, would broadcast information in Portuguese to a great number of listeners in Brazil. Not only did Brazil benefit from the wealth of information available in Portuguese, but all the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa as well, and through an agreement with Portuguese distributors, it would also reach many countries of Europe and East Timor.

4. New information technologies must also be used in the task of spreading the message of the United Nations, and the Internet was an extraordinary tool for that purpose. His delegation congratulated the Department of Public Information on the development of the United Nations web site, its rich and comprehensive content and easy access. The impressive number of daily visits to the site showed the keen public interest in the work of the United Nations. The links to pages devoted to relations between the United Nations, civil society and the business sector, areas to which the United Nations must pay special attention in the twenty-first century, were also commendable.

5. As for the content of the web site, it would be appropriate to use the site to make information available about treaties and other international agreements and to offer search mechanisms to streamline the work of missions of Member States and of academic researchers. In order to build a more democratic and transparent Organization, the availability of resolutions and statements on the web site must be increased and access must be user-friendly.

6. In order to improve the data flow originating at the United Nations, it was important to bear in mind that, in addition to the organizational and technological aspects, the format of the information and the strategy for its channelling and distribution must be considered. His delegation invited the Committee on Information to examine over the next few years the very substance of information, especially at a time when the public image and credibility of the United Nations must be preserved. It was time to work on ways of providing widespread information which supported the concept that the world was a better place where the United Nations was active and strong.

7. **Mr. Mwandembwa** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation supported the position of the Group of 77 and China and commended the efforts of the Department of Public Information in the field of information.

8. As a developing country, Tanzania believed that the United Nations must take a leading role in helping developing countries in the field of information. The world was changing rapidly, and modern communications technology was transcending the barriers of time and space. With globalization, the world was becoming one big global community. Therefore, it was absurd that in one part of the world the most advanced telecommunications technology was being used while the rest of the world still used outmoded technology. The gulf between the developed and developing world in information technology must be bridged if both parties were to achieve progress and development. His delegation believed that the United Nations could play an important role in that regard.

9. Globalization and the movement towards an information economy heavily dependent on knowledge-based products threatened the already tenuous position of developing countries in the global

economy. Only through modern information and communications technology could those countries accelerate their economic and social development.

10. The need for advanced information technology should not, however, preclude the maintenance of such traditional media as radio and television, as most developing countries still used them, particularly radio. It was heartening to note that both the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-first session and the report of the Secretary-General insisted that the use of traditional media should be maintained and expanded. His delegation remained optimistic that the pilot projects planned in that area would be executed where they were most needed, namely, in the developing countries.

11. Regarding the process of integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP, his delegation favoured the option of selective integration, as conditions varied widely from country to country. In Tanzania, for example, the United Nations Information Centre operated under the direction of the UNDP Resident Representative without formal integration. In some cases, the process of integration had not been productive and the services provided by some integrated centres had fallen drastically, raising serious questions about the validity of the policy. The process of integration without examining the prevailing material conditions in each country could reduce the effectiveness of the centres. Full consultation with the host Government on integration was preferable. While integration could strengthen the unified image of the United Nations in the field and achieve economies of scale, resource allocation remained the main obstacle. With proper funding and staffing, most of the problems of those offices would be solved and they would function efficiently.

12. **Mr. Tae-young Moon** (Republic of Korea) said that, in response to the unprecedented influence of the free flow of information on the lives of people around the world, as a result of the accelerated pace of advances in information and communications technologies, the United Nations should enhance public interest and understanding of its many activities. Many people were unclear about what the United Nations did and how it affected their lives. Public awareness was highly important to the success of United Nations activities, and his delegation thus welcomed the Secretary-General's initiatives in that area.

13. Despite considerable financial and personnel constraints, the Department of Public Information had achieved many tangible results in its efforts to improve the United Nations web site, develop more effective news-gathering and delivery systems and strengthen communication channels at the country and regional levels. The United Nations News Service, launched in September and built around the newly-established United Nations News Centre, allowed journalists all over the world to access developing stories from the United Nations as they unfolded. The United Nations homepage facilitated the work of the missions of Member States and thus made it more efficient. As the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had pointed out in its first report for the biennium 2000-2001, the United Nations web site should become a major instrument in the dissemination of information in the United Nations system.

14. With regard to the equal treatment of all six official languages on the United Nations web site, his delegation welcomed the revised text of draft resolution B (A/54/21/Add.1), which requested the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all the official languages of the Organization, having in mind the goal of achieving modular parity between official languages in a cost-effective manner, and with a focus on textual content.

15. Yet there were other impediments to visiting the United Nations web site. Capacity to access electronic information varied considerably from country to country, and the international community should spare no effort to narrow the technology gap between developed and developing countries. Concurrently, the Department of Public Information must continue its outreach activities through the traditional media; such as print, radio and television, all of which were indispensable for reaching vast segments of the international audience.

16. As for the development of United Nations radio broadcasting capacity, the Department's initiative to explore ways to launch a pilot project in collaboration with Member States and their relevant institutions required their active participation. His delegation hoped that the project would bear fruit in the coming year. The United Nations should also make full use of the occasion of the Millennium Assembly to enliven its activities. The international media focus on the United Nations would provide a unique opportunity to raise popular support for the United Nations and its vital role

in world affairs. His Government was committed to cooperating in the public information efforts of the United Nations and in the work of the Committee on Information.

17. **Ms. Rusu** (Romania) said that her Government supported the statement made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States. Romania attached great importance to United Nations activities in the information field, because of their role in gaining the interest and support of Governments and civil society throughout the world for the promotion of the objectives of peace, development and human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

18. In the current "information age", where technological advances transcended the barriers of time, space and borders between countries, the impact of all kinds of information on the maintenance and promotion of progress and development of humanity was immeasurable. Therefore, the communications media must be consolidated and further developed both in quality and variety, in order to ensure a wider dissemination of information among all countries and the elimination of imbalances.

19. Her delegation welcomed the proposals made by the Secretary-General on programmes and policies in the areas of information and communications in order to ensure that the message of the United Nations was transmitted more forcefully and that events and actions taken were more accurately reported. It also welcomed the efforts to reorient the work of the Department of Public Information as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415). At the same time, her delegation believed that a consolidation of the Department was necessary in order to respond better to the expectations of Member States and their people.

20. Romania actively encouraged the work of the United Nations information centres, as well as the partnership with governments, mass media, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and the business community. The United Nations Information Centre in Bucharest was one of the first centres of that kind established by the United Nations, and it attracted a large and diverse audience. Her Government welcomed the creation of new information centres in various regions of the world, especially in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, but it was convinced that the allocation of resources for the establishment of new centres should take into consideration the needs of existing ones. In the light of the experience gained by the Bucharest Information Centre over so many years, it might be a good time to re-examine its conditions of operation.

21. Her delegation strongly supported the functional autonomy of all the information centres. The process of full consultation with the host Governments would definitely help to promote a better, more accurate, more transparent and consistent image of the United Nations. In that regard, her delegation was looking forward to studying the draft guidelines by the Department of Public Information and UNDP indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres. It also supported the draft resolutions submitted under the current item.

22. **Mr. Getahoun** (Ethiopia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The United Nations currently faced many challenges in its complex task of disseminating information. Globalization spawned by the acceleration of information technology had had dramatic consequences for the Organization and had expanded the role of the Department of Public Information. However, the Department was faced with several constraints in fulfilling its mandate, which must be reduced in an effort to achieve maximum efficiency in the dissemination of information to a global audience.

23. With regard to the process of integration of United Nations information centres with the field offices of UNDP, his delegation hoped that the setbacks identified in the Secretary-General's report would not continuously jeopardize the flow of information. It felt strongly that practical measures should be taken to balance the desire for cost-effectiveness with the need to maintain the efficiency of the integration exercise. The United Nations information centres were key components of its outreach to the world community at large and played a crucial role in disseminating information to remote corners of the globe, thereby forming public opinion and creating awareness on such issues as social development, poverty eradication, education, environment, peace and security. The Department should assist developing countries in improving their information capacity and enhancing public awareness of United Nations activities. His delegation supported the initiative undertaken by the Department of Public Information to provide training

courses for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries, but efforts should be made to increase the number of trainees.

24. While his delegation welcomed the increased use of advanced technology by the United Nations, for example the Internet and web sites, it also pointed out that attention should be accorded to traditional means of communication, which were still the main source of information in most of the developing countries. United Nations Radio fulfilled an essential function in disseminating information on the activities and objectives of the Organization. Ethiopia was aware of the multi-dimensional rewards to be reaped from an enhanced communications infrastructure. In its efforts to combat marginalization in the global economy, the Government had embarked on measures to strengthen its information infrastructure, but despite the progress made, much remained to be done. Lack of adequate financial resources constituted a major obstacle. The Government would welcome a contribution from the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the form of a programme to provide training assistance and development programmes to improve and strengthen its information capacity. His delegation called on the developed countries to assist developing countries by transferring information technology and through capacity-building.

25. His delegation attached great importance to the role of the United Nations in public information. However, it was vital that the impartiality of information should be maintained, as well as equity in dissemination of information. To that end, the infrastructure of the Department of Public Information must be strengthened.

26. Ms. **Dukuly-Tolbert** (Liberia) said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The twentieth century had witnessed rapid advances in the information and communications media. Managers, whether in the private or public sector, needed adequate, accurate information to help them formulate policies affecting millions of people, and an informed public of a free society could respond intelligently to the operation of their government. The maintenance of that healthy relationship between the governors and the governed called for modern know-how and communications facilities.

27. In the electronic age, characterized by globalization, the United Nations should be in the forefront of efforts to bridge the gap between developing and developed countries in the area of information and communications. It was therefore encouraging to note that the Department of Public Information collaborated with national Governments in conducting seminars and training local journalists . Her delegation also commended the detailed report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415).

28. At its twenty-first session, the Committee on Information had called upon Member States to increase assistance for the development of communications infrastructure in developing countries and urged all countries to ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their task without interference.

29. Against that background, her delegation requested the Secretary-General to re-establish the United Nations Information Centre in Monrovia and to accelerate the training programmes for journalists from developing countries. The Centre would play a key role in gathering and disseminating news for vital sectors of Liberian society, assist the Government in efforts to promote national reconciliation, economic reconstruction and reintegration of refugees and to sustain peace and democracy. It would also serve as an avenue for Liberian youths to learn more about the positive role the United Nations continued to play in bringing peace and stability to Liberia.

30. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Committee on Information and thanked the Committee for its decision to admit Liberia as a member. It supported the draft resolution and hoped that it would be adopted without a vote. It also supported the initiative of the Secretary-General to develop the United Nations international radio broadcast facility.

31. **Mr. Deirki** (Syrian Arab Republic) stressed the importance of a new world information and communications order that was more just and effective and reflected the interests and aspirations of peoples, with a balanced flow of information from a diversity of sources. His delegation was concerned at the persistent inequality between the developed and the developing countries in communications technology. His Government was attempting to cover the issues of interest to the country and its citizens through audio-visual and print media and to demonstrate the need to achieve economic and social development, because

information and a higher standard of living complemented each other.

32. The United Nations in general, and the Department of Public Information in particular, must use information to promote their aims and activities in favour of peace, disarmament, economic and social development and environmental protection. The Organization must also endeavour to ensure the transfer of appropriate technology to developing countries and defend the rights of peoples subjected to foreign occupation.

33. Information should reflect the interests of the majority of Member States in matters dealt with in the Organization. It was imperative that the United Nations should not transmit subjective views or particular political positions, which would undermine its credibility and authority and disappoint the hopes many had placed in it.

34. The work of the Department of Public Information had, in general, borne fruit, but some problems remained, in particular the lack of parity between the six official languages, both in print and in electronic media. Many delegations believed that option C proposed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/1999/9) on equal treatment for the six languages on the United Nations web site did not meet the needs of users in developing countries. His delegation urged the Department of Public Information to redistribute the funds already allocated in the budget in order to achieve linguistic parity as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 53/208, and avoid accentuating the predominance of one language version over others, Arabic in particular.

35. In the view of his delegation, an international United Nations radio station should be created. It requested the Department to promote the project and give it the priority it deserved, as radio was among the most accessible and cost-effective means of communication.

36. **Mr. Djeumo** (Cameroon) said that, considering that the information centres had proven to be irreplaceable tools for the dissemination of the ideas, principles and work of the United Nations, his delegation noted with deep concern that the activities and programmes carried out by those centres had been reduced as a result of their integration into UNDP field offices. That concern was reflected in the draft resolution on United Nations public information activities and policies adopted by the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session.

37. Cameroon requested the appointment of a director for the United Nations Information Centre in Yaoundé, whose activities had fallen off during the time it had been without a director. That appointment would allow the centre to resume the dissemination of information in its area of activity (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon), and it would thus meet the needs of the people of the subregion.

38. **Mr. Speransky** (Russian Federation) said that developments in the field of information confirmed the important role it played in the life of the international community as a whole and of each country in particular. The United Nations, while intensifying its work in the field of information, should give priority to issues of international security, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/70 on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security.

39. International principles must be elaborated to strengthen international information security, first in the form of a multilateral declaration, and later as a multilateral international treaty, with the main objective of creating the conditions for a safe international information exchange on the basis of equality, in order to prevent the use of information technologies for terrorist or criminal purposes, including destabilization of society. A way must also be found to prevent unauthorized transborder information influence and information wars.

40. His delegation shared the strategic objectives, functional priorities and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, and welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to improve the Organization's capabilities with regard to the use of modern multimedia technologies. It supported the creation of a United Nations web site and its translation into all the official languages, including Russian.

41. His delegation approved measures to improve United Nations communications activities at the national and regional levels and noted with satisfaction that the recently established communications groups were already beginning to make an effective contribution to the formation of a realistic image of the Organization. The reorientation of Department activities towards application of the latest technologies

led to higher quality programmes and broader audiences all over the world. His delegation supported the efforts by the Organization to open and improve new specialized web sites, and emphasized that it was important to provide up-to-date information and reference material on peacekeeping operations and missions. It approved the creation of the electronic mail service for transmission of news from the United Nations to journalists in many countries of the world and supported the growing trend to hold meetings in Member States in close collaboration with local mass media.

42. At the same time, it was necessary to continue to use traditional means of communication, because they were the most easily accessible. His delegation was interested in the implementation of the direct international broadcasting project, in particular, in the Russian language. It called upon the Secretary-General and the Department to continue to focus on the issue of establishing an international broadcasting service and to inform the Committee on Information of the results of the Department's study in order to determine the interest of Member States and radio stations in the project. He drew the attention of the Secretariat to the fact that, despite assurances to the contrary, the Department had so far not enhanced the Russian component of the United Nations radio service.

43. The system of United Nations information centres must be strengthened and new technologies must continue to be introduced into daily use. As the Moscow Information Centre was playing an increasingly important role in the dissemination of information about United Nations activities in Russian, it would be appropriate to consider strengthening its staff.

44. **Mr. Semenenko** (Ukraine) said that his delegation supported the measures taken by the Department to reorient its policies and activities and applauded its efforts to disseminate information. While technological advances were important, however, it was important to maintain outreach through the traditional media. His delegation had always supported the proposal to develop the United Nations radio broadcasting capacity and believed that the success of that project would depend on the effective involvement of interested Member States and the provision of necessary resources. Ukraine would make available air time on its national broadcasting system for daily broadcasts from United Nations radio.

45. With respect to the advancement of radio and other traditional media, the international community must not lose sight of the need to update United Nations television and Internet technologies. His delegation supported the efforts to enrich the content of the United Nations web site but reiterated the need to build progressively a multilingual site to achieve parity between the six official languages.

46. Turning to the initiative to integrate United Nations information centres into UNDP field offices, he noted that the information component under the direction of UNDP in Ukraine was effective and presented a unified image of the United Nations along with enhanced information activities in major areas of the Organization's work, although experiences could vary from region to region.

47. The aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster continued to affect millions of people in Ukraine. The United Nations had a key role to play in communicating information about the disaster; the Department should enhance the publication and dissemination of related information and establish a special long-term programme.

48. Finally, the problem of attacks against journalists working in tense situations should remain on the agenda, and strategies for their protection should be prepared.

49. **Mr. Rani Ismail Hadi** (Malaysia) said that it was important for the United Nations to keep abreast of developments and take advantage of breakthroughs in technology in a world of virtually instantaneous communication.

50. His delegation welcomed the efforts being made by the Organization to use new information technologies for the benefit of Member States, whether by expanding its electronic database, preparing web sites or placing computer terminals at the disposal of delegations. Aware of the changes brought about by the information era, Malaysia had embarked on a national plan to promote modernization of companies, both domestic and international. That plan formed part of a programme called "Vision 2020", with the objective of transforming the country into a developed nation. Malaysia wished to establish a participatory society based on knowledge and information.

51. The information age also brought with it a number of challenges. The processing of news had

become complex. Information was not controlled by the authorities but had moved to other organizations and institutions. It was not a question of controlling the inflow of information but its content, in order to protect citizens, especially children and other vulnerable groups. From his Government's perspective, the use of information technology must lead to an improvement in the quality of life for individuals. Investment in technology must benefit not only the investors but the public as well; the people must become not only consumers but also producers of technology. Therefore, priority should be given not only to the quantity but also to the quality of investments.

52. An electronic government, one of Malaysia's objectives, was not merely governing through electronic means. Its real objective was to revamp structures, systems and procedures in pursuit of excellence.

53. His Government was aware that it did not yet possess the required technologies or knowledge to achieve its targets for modernization and therefore stressed the importance of closer cooperation with the rest of the world. In that regard, it encouraged "smart partnerships" between the Government and the private sector — collaboration instead of confrontation, enrichment instead of exploitation.

54. The market rewarded efficiency and punished inefficiency, but efficiency and equity did not go hand in hand. Therefore, leaving the digital economy to regulate itself would widen the gap between rich and poor countries. While the role of rules should be reduced, they should not be abolished completely, in order to prevent anarchy from reigning in the market place.

55. In conclusion, advances in technology must be based on a strong system of moral values. The danger of the Internet was the abandonment of moral values by some of its users. The United Nations had an important role to play in promoting those universal values.

56. **Mr. Farar** (United States of America) said that creating and disseminating accurate and meaningful information was a challenge in an interconnected world. His Government noted with satisfaction the results achieved by the Department in developing new communications strategies and the creation of the new structures necessary to achieve the objectives established. It also supported the recommendation of the Committee on Information that the Department should take more time to study ways to use the concept of modular parity in producing web sites. However, given the rapid pace of evolution in technology, the work of modernizing the web sites could not be delayed until the next session of the Committee, and current sites must be continued while options for increasing material available in all official languages were explored.

57. He regretted that budgetary resources had not been allocated to all departments for web site management and development. Given the tightly constrained resources with which the Department of Public Information must work, his delegation supported the proposal of Egypt to establish a working group of the Committee on Information to assist the Department in deciding where efficiencies could be obtained. That measure should help members of the Committee to understand the goals and constraints of the Department and take them into account in its recommendations. His delegation believed that the Department must accomplish its tasks within existing resources and find additional cost savings where it could. Ultimately, the web sites would improve overall efficiency, and costs for such sites could be defrayed by redistribution of resources within the Department.

58. The United Nations must reach many levels of audiences, resulting in the need to develop different media for different audiences. Consequently, in its forthcoming study of web sites, the Department must take into consideration that diversity and consider whether its current forms of communication were the most effective.

59. In conclusion, his delegation supported proposal C-3 in document A/AC.198/1999/9, but believed that the resources must be found within the Department's current budget, which represented over 5 per cent of the entire United Nations budget. His delegation would not support a request for additional funds.

60. **Mr. Pohan** (Indonesia) said that his delegation supported the statement by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

61. On the eve of the new millennium, the international community must endeavour to allow all humanity to participate on an equal basis in the new information era. A balanced and just flow of credible information must be established. His delegation

reaffirmed the need to promote the new world information and communications order.

62. His delegation supported the efforts of the Secretariat to continue the reorientation of its activities with a view to projecting the image of the Organization as an open, transparent and public institution capable of meeting the principal objectives enshrined in the Charter. The communications media were important in those efforts, but they did not automatically transmit information emanating from the United Nations to the world public because of various constraints.

63. His delegation was pleased that in draft resolution B the Secretary-General was requested to give a particular focus to educational institutions as key and indispensable partners in efforts to fully inform the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations. Moreover, it was gratified that, in its efforts to provide the global media as speedily as possible with news material generated by the Organization, the Secretariat did not forget that the United Nations was not a news agency nor did it compete with the agencies.

64. Indonesia supported the work of the Secretary-General's spokesman, including the briefings to the media. It understood that the Secretariat objected to the presence of delegations at those briefings, but it would like to see that rule applied to all delegations equally and criteria for exceptions established.

65. The most important aspect of the public information activities of the United Nations was their credibility and reliability. Everyone expected the information coming from the United Nations system to be objective, and it was encouraging that those standards were being maintained. Nevertheless, some lapses must be pointed out in the hope that valuable lessons could be drawn from those experiences, namely two instances surrounding the popular consultation in East Timor.

66. The first instance showed how not to conduct an information campaign. On 14 September, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had issued a release stating that large numbers of the population continued to be systematically assassinated and that current estimates put the number of deaths at 7,000. According to the Secretary-General's spokesman, FAO had not even been present on the ground at the time. That figure had been an exaggeration and had caused confusion in world public opinion. It appeared to Indonesia that the figure had been used to gain contributions and support, but at the expense of East Timor, Indonesia and the truth.

67. The second instance showed how not to select a spokesman for a United Nations mission. It had been evident from the beginning that the impartiality of the first spokesman for the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was questionable. Its public statements had often been based on "unconfirmed reports" and had lacked credibility and reliability. It was important for the Department of Public Information to play a central role in selecting spokesmen for United Nations missions.

68. Indonesia reiterated that it would continue to support the public information activities of the United Nations and stressed the importance of continuous enhancement of their objectivity.

69. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), in reply to the views of several delegations, said that data from the Department of Public Information indicated that approximately 10 per cent of visits to the United Nations web site came from developing countries, and that two years earlier, that figure had been only 4 per cent. However, the figures could not be exact because some servers did not use the two-letter code indicating the country of origin of the visit. The overall trend indicated that the most popular section of the web site was the documents area, including the General Assembly page, the news section, including press releases, peace and security and CyberSchoolBus.

70. As for the linguistic balance of the United Nations web site, the English and French sites were the most developed, primarily because they had been the first. The Arabic and Chinese sites had been launched only in 1998. Also, technology for creating pages in Arabic and Chinese was still not adequately developed.

71. As for the discontinuation of the Arabic version of the Department's annual compendium of General Assembly resolutions, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had informed him that, in view of technological developments, it was currently able to produce the official version of that document in all languages more quickly than the Department's version. Accordingly, to avoid duplication of effort, the Department had decided to cease production of the compendium.

72. In reply to the questions of several delegations about the status of preparations for the launch of the pilot project for the development of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, he said that, in order to establish the availability of broadcasting facilities, the Caribbean region had been the first to be surveyed, with extremely positive results. Surveys were being conducted in other regions, and the results would be submitted to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session.

73. With regard to cooperation between the Department and the Caribbean News Agency and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, the Department worked closely with both organizations, which had recently merged, and would probably broadcast the daily programme of the pilot project.

74. Concerning the possibility of increasing the production of radio programmes aimed at French-speaking African countries, to that end the Department had redeployed an additional post at the P-2 level to the French language group of the Radio Service. As for the production of radio programmes in French/Creole, the Department had continued to study the issue with due regard to budgetary considerations and the need to ensure parity between all non-official languages.

75. Regarding the expansion of the Russian component of the Radio Service, that would depend on an increase in resources and broadcast time, which was being pursued as part of the implementation of the pilot project.

76. Turning to the suggestion to undertake a public information campaign leading up to the conference on small arms, he said that the Department was working closely with the Department of Disarmament Affairs on that issue, and was also producing a film entitled "Armed to the Teeth" which would be used to promote the first stage of the campaign.

77. The suggestion had been made that the Department should strengthen its cooperation with SIDSNet. It should be noted that the Department had done so in the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on the sustainable development of small island developing States. It planned to continue that cooperation, as SIDSNet was an excellent channel to reach small island audiences.

78. Regarding the need to ensure regional coverage of activities relating to the special sessions of the General Assembly, he said that the Department was working closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to promote the special sessions of the General Assembly on women and on social development. The United Nations information centres were taking the lead in promoting those events as well as the Millennium Assembly and Summit.

79. In reply to those delegations which had underlined the importance of the training activities for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and the requests for their strengthening, he said that the Department would continue to seek ways to expand the annual training programme to include more participants, and to invite journalists and broadcasters from those countries to participate in other programmes on such thematic issues as development and human rights.

80. During 1999, the Dag Hammarskjold Library had organized four regional workshops for librarians, which had been very well received, and it had decided to continue that programme in the coming biennium. It would also continue to expand its electronic resources and to acquire materials in traditional formats on topics of general interest, including peace and security, development, human rights and others.

81. The Department was aware of the concerns expressed over the integration of information centres. He was working closely with the Administrator of UNDP, and further steps in that process would be taken only after consultations with the host Governments, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. A questionnaire had been sent to host Governments of integrated centres, and another to their directors, as part of a review of the status of those centres, for the purpose of establishing guidelines for the future.

82. In countries without an information centre, the practice of the Organization had been for the UNDP field office to assume responsibility for public information activities.

83. Concerning the wish expressed by Jamaica to see an information component established to provide services to the Northern Caribbean, the Department was making efforts to assign those duties to the UNESCO representative and if successful, would provide the necessary equipment and invite him to participate in relevant training.

84. Croatia had suggested that the United Nations Liaison Office in Zagreb could take on the information functions, and, since that office had more resources than the UNDP office, the Department would consider the possibility. As for the request of Liberia, the plans to reopen the Information Centre in Monrovia under the direction of the Resident Coordinator were moving ahead.

85. Despite staff reductions which the Department had been obliged to make, it had been able to reinstate the post of reference assistant in the Port-of-Spain Information Centre.

86. Several delegations had stressed the need for additional staff, especially directors of information centres, but staffing of field offices had been cut drastically during the previous and current bienniums, and only the General Assembly could determine the extent to which the Department could meet those requests.

Adoption of decisions

87. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take a joint decision on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision recommended by the Committee on Information, namely, draft resolution A, contained in paragraph 49 of document A/54/21, and the revised texts of draft resolution B and the draft decision contained in paragraph 1 of the addendum to the report (A/54/21/Add.1).

88. *It was so decided.*

89. **The Chairman** invited delegations to make statements before the adoption of a joint decision on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision.

90. **Ms. Steele** (United States of America) said that her Government regretted that it could not join the consensus because of the programme budget implications of paragraph 35 of the revised text of draft resolution B, in particular, as contained in document A/54/21/Add.1.

91. **Mr. Sattar** (Secretary of the Committee) read out paragraph 35 of the revised text of draft resolution B and said that, in that paragraph, the Committee on Information was not requesting specific measures which would have financial consequences but was requesting the Secretary-General to continue his efforts and to submit proposals to the Committee on Information for consideration at its next session. Those efforts would be made by the Department of Public Information within the resources allocated in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Therefore, adoption of the draft resolution would have no programme budget implications. However, if at its next session the Committee on Information decided to accept a proposal on the United Nations web sites, a detailed statement of the programme budget implications would be submitted.

92. *Draft resolution A, the revised texts of draft resolution B and the draft decision were adopted.*

Completion of the Committee's work

93. **The Chairman** declared that the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) had completed its work for the fifty-fourth session.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.